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AUTHOR Jong, Rowena
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ABSTRACT

A study based on textual analysis of sales letters is reported that evaluates the Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (AIDA) approach to teaching the writing of sales letters. Thirty business letters written by undergraduate business students and executives were analyzed. The forms of cohesion, voice pattern, and information focus of the letters were also examined by 15 readers who determined the overall effectiveness of the letters. AIDA represents a structural approach to the components of a sales letter and is based on the notion that "inductively" and "indirectly" organized sales letters allow writers to justify an action before requesting readers to take it. The letter should secure the attention of readers, sustain readers' interest, create a desire for readers to take action, and urge readers to take action. It was found that all the letters analyzed adhered closely to the AIDA plan but the majority of subjects failed to produce persuasive letters that took the need of the readers into account. Most letters adopted the writer-centered approach. Common pitfalls are described and illustrated. It is concluded that the contextual situation and the field of discourse must be considered in order to make sales letters most effective. Contains 9 references. (LB)

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The A.I.D.A. Plan and the Writing of Sales Letters

Rowena Jong, Nanyang Technological University

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Background:

Sales letter is a type of persuasive business writing which aims to get results, replies and sales. A sales letter may be written for 4 main purposes: 1. To sell directly by mail, 2. To encourage further enquires, 3. To persuade readers to visit a shop and buy and 4. To build good will. Without a sales person on hand to persuade and convince, the sales letter is on its own to get the customer's attention, sustain the customer's interest long enough for persuasion to take effect, and hence take action. Whatever reason a sales letter may be written, it is designed to sell the reader on a particular course of action, reflect on the message, weigh the benefits and shortcomings and then make the desired decision.

The A.I.D.A. approach is commonly used as guidelines to the writing and evaluation of sales letters. Many textbooks on business communications advocate the AIDA formula as a basis for writing sales letters. Gibson and Hodgetts (1990) claim that the most popular way of organizing and constructing the sales message is by adopting the A.I.D.A. approach which they believe is useful for most persuasive letters regardless of their specific purposes. Himstreet and Baty (1987) believe that the sequence of ideas in a sales presentation should be inductive: get attention, introduce a product, give evidence, and encourage action. While Lesikar (1991) refers the same approach in the writing of sales letter as the indirect plan, Murphy and Hildebrandt (1988) point out that this approach is sometimes referred to as the four 'P's -promise, picture, prove and push or discussed under three parts- stars, chain, and hook. Although the A.I.D.A. plan may be termed differently by different writers, it is basically the organizational structure of the letter that is being referred to.

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The A.I.D.A. Approach/Plan

A.I.D.A, an acronym of 'attention', 'interest', 'desire' and 'action', represent the four organizational components of a sales letter. Business writers who follow this structural approach believe that the 'inductively' and 'indirectly' organized sales letters allow writers to justify an action before requesting readers take it. As the main function of sales letters is to persuade readers to want the product or the service provided, it is assumed that if the writer's request were stated directly at the beginning, the letter would not be as effective. Before any specific request is mentioned, the reader should be prepared for it. The strategy is to present facts to indicate that the proposal is beneficial or useful. As readers are not expecting the writer's message, the latter should attract readers' attention and arouse their interest before revealing his/her intention. In other words, the letter should begin by securing the attention of readers, sustaining readers' interest, creating a desire for readers to take action and urging readers to take action.

Methodology:

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the A.I.D.A. plan or the structural approach in the teaching of sales letters, 30 business letters, written by undergraduate business students and executives are analysed to see how far the A.I.D.A. plan is observed. The forms of cohesion, the pattern of voice and the information focus of the letters are also analyzed. The effectiveness of the sales letters analyzed are, in turn, determined by fifteen readers.

Scope:

The study is based solely on textual analysis of the sales letters. Brochures and pamphlets that the subjects include in their sales package are not taken into account.

Findings:

All the letters analyzed adhere closely to the A.I.D.A. plan. However, the majority of the subjects fail to produce persuasive sales letters which take the need of the readers into account. Some of the letters do not have any selling point, others include information that is irrelevant. Moreover, the tone does not always coincide with the content of the letters. Above all, most letters analyzed adopted the writer-centered approach.

In the subsequent paragraphs are examples of some common pitfalls found in the sales letter analyzed. The first two letters illustrated below show the subjects' inability to select and focus information according to the purpose of writing. The first is a sales letter which invites readers to make enquiries about some banking services. As an attention catcher the writer has chosen:

Letter One:

Dear Sir/Madam

Welcome to the world of speciality banking- the Time Saver Service by the National Bank.

To awaken interest and arouse the desire of the readers, the writer lists out the benefits potential customers are entitled to:

Once you become a member, you can enjoy a special service, personal attention and exclusive benefits:

a personal banker to attend to your banking needs...
a cosy setting to carry out your transactions in comfort....
free cheque collection and delivery service.
updates on financial news and investment opportunities.

All these can be yours at our National Bank Service Centre, a special place created just for you. Best of all, you can do your banking here and still maintain your account at any of our branches.

In stimulating action, the writer writes:

Should you require more information, or if you'd like to make arrangements to meet us to discuss your individual needs, call us at the National Bank Service Hotline: 87302938

Distinguish yourself and enjoy our banking service at the same time. Simply return the application form in the enclosed envelope.

As a welcoming gesture, we have a gift for all applicants. It's just our way of saying "we will be happy to serve you"

Yours sincerely

Manager

The letter contains all the structural elements of a sales promotion letter but does not appear to be persuasive. Firstly, there is not any central selling point or major appeal. The writer assumes that readers know what the Time-Saver Service is. (However, if the readers already know of the Time-Saver Service, perhaps this letter should be presented differently). The benefits listed out are standard service offered by banks and hence the National Bank Time-Saver Service becomes another name given to the banking facilities listed. Furthermore, the service and facilities listed do not indicate how time can be saved. Moreover, according to the readers, the unspecified welcoming gift to be given to new customers does not offer much attraction. In sum, the subject does not know how to select relevant information that is persuasive and functional.

In the next sales letter the writer is trying to persuade readers to visit the bookfair:

Letter Two:

Dear Sir/Madam

1991 BOOKFAIR, 31 JULY - 8 AUGUST

You are cordially invited to visit us during the above Book Fair at:

Exhibition Hall
World Trade Centre
11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.

A wide range of NEW books will be on display and we are sure you do not want to miss the opportunity of seeing a good selection of new titles under one roof at a convenient location.

For you only, upon presentation of this letter at our booths, you can now purchase a copy of our Genuine leather-cover dictionary at half price. The regular price is $190.00.

The dictionary makes an ideal gift for student, teacher or executive. Bound in genuine leather, this dictionary is alphabetically tabbed for easy reference. The gold-leaf edges and gold-stamping gives it a look of distinction.

The offer is good while stock lasts!

See you there !....

Yours truly

Anne Tan
Marketing Manager

p.s. We also have discounts on other titles open to the public. Kindly share this information with your students.

The subject observes closely the A.I.D.A. structure. In securing the attention of the reader, he begins his letter with an invitation. To awaken the interest on the topic and arouse the reader's desire to visit the bookfair, the subject writes that "there will be a good selection of new titles under one roof.." as well as the special offer that comes with the exhibition. To urge for action, the subject reminds readers that "the offer is (only) good while stock lasts" However, the information presented in the letter does not tell readers much about the nature of the bookfair, the kinds of exhibits, and so forth. The focus of the letter seems to be on the special offer- the genuine leather-bound dictionary. The information is so unspecific that it can be used as a sales letter for any other book exhibitions. As the letter lacks a central selling point and there is no mention of the kind of exhibits in the bookfair, it is difficult to persuade readers to visit the bookfair.

The letter below, drafted by an executive in the Corporate Card Department of a credit card company, also reveals the writer's inadequacy in selecting appropriate information to arouse

the interest of the readers:

Letter Three:

26 October 1991

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

This is to inform you that absolutely one year of free membership (i.e. waiver of entrance/ annual fee) will be yours if you satisfy our requirement and apply before 20 November 1991.

By being a Maxi-Club Cardmember, you will enjoy emergency cash advance facilities.... worldwide card replacement.... round the clock towing services.... etc.

Why don't you complete the application form and return it together with you payslip to the Maxi-Club. We will quickly assess you and let you know as soon as possible.

For further queries, please call 3478900.

I certainly look forward to welcoming you to the Club.

Yours sincerely

The subject attracts the attention of the readers by indicating that 'one year of free membership' will be given those who apply for membership before the specified date. To sustain interest and arouse the reader's desire to act, the subject lists out all the benefits which come with membership subscription. To urge for action, the subject invites readers to complete the application form with the payslip so as to assess the them as soon as possible.

The three sales letters illustrated adhere closely to the A.I.D.A. plan yet, they are invariably rated as ineffective since these letters fial to produce any psychological effect on the readers. None of the readers wanted to make further enquiries about the products or ideas advertised.

The analysis also reveals that the subjects do not use an appropriate style and tone in their sales letters to appeal to the intended readers. Inconsistent salutation and complimentary close seem to be quite a common stylistic error: In letter one and three, the subjects open the letter with "Dear Sir/Madam" and close the end with "Yours sincerely". Inconsistent tone is another common pitfall. In the second letter on persuading readers to visit the bookfair, the writer opens the letter formally with "Dear Sir/ Madam" followed by a formal invitation, "you are cordially invited..." and ends the letter with an informal remark "See you there".

Moreover, in the Maxi-Club sales letter (letter three), the subject does not adopt a consistent tone in the letter. At the beginning of the letter, the writer starts with an formal opening "it is to inform you.." near the end of the letter, it reads, "Why don't you complete.." a conversational tone. Most important of all, the subject is not persuading the reader to act but assuming an air of superiority in granting the cardmembership to readers who qualify. ("We will quickly assess you..")

In the following are another two examples of inappropraite tone. In the first example the subject is introducing and selling the magazine "Electronics". In the section where he urges for action it is written:

> Make sure that you fill out all necessary information in printing in application form to avoid miscommunciation.

The writer does not realize that his commanding tone with a slight tinge of accusation will displease readers. In the second example, the subject is selling the service of the Hall-Dave & Company Estate agent. In the middle of the letter where the writer is showing the credentials of the Company, he writes:

> Well, if you do not have confidence in our Company, you haven't been around. Hall-Dave & Company is one of the Nation's largest estate agents with branches all over the country.

In this situation, the subject belittles readers probably without knowing it. All in all, the subjects fail to use a tone which is pleasing to the reader and have a persuasive effect. They do not realize that a positive tone is important in winning the readers over.

The result reveals that relying solely on the A.I.D.A approach or the teaching of the structural framework is not adequate in helping business writers produce persuasive letters. The subjects invariably use the A.I.D.A. plan as a formula without considering how the text should function as a coherent and persuasive letter. They also fail to develop ideas and present relevant information according to the functional purpose of the writing. Furthermore, the letters in the study indicate an writer-oriented approach in writing in which the subjects have not considered the impact of their lexical choice, their choice of mood and modality on the readers. An analysis focusing on communicative purposes within a communicative setting will be useful in helping sales-letter writers to see how the letters will be read from the recipient's end and hence enlighten the writers on not only how to write it but also what should be written.

Halliday and Hasan's conceptions on contextual situation and the three variables 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode' seems to present a comprehensive approach in teaching sales-letter writing as it provides the writer a more thorough analysis of the targeted reader.

4.1 The Contextual Situation:

All use of language has a context, a situation in which the text is unfolded and to be interpreted. The context of situation, the context in which the text unfolds, is encapsulated in the text through a systematic relationship between the social environment on the one hand, and the functional organization of language on the other. It is the situation which enables linguistic interaction to take place and gives the participants information about the meanings that are being exchanged and the meanings that are likely to be exchanged. (Halliday, 1985)

Types of linguistic situation differ from one another, broadly speaking, in three aspects: first, what is actually taking place; second, who is taking part; and third, what part the language is playing. These three variables, taken together, determine the range within which meanings are selected and the forms which are used for their expression. Like other types of discourse, the sales situation in the letter comprises three situational factors 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode'.

The text, in this case, the sales letter, is an instance of social meaning in a particular context of situation. A sales letter selling air-conditioners to housewives produces a context where the text (the sales letter) unfolds will be different from that selling the same products to business executives. These two situations in which linguistic interaction takes place will prompt the writer a great deal of information about the content of the letter.

4.2 The Field of Discourse:

The 'field of discourse refers to what is happening, or to the nature of the social action that is taking place in the text. It includes the subject-matter and the type of social action or activities which determine the ranges of meaning as content. The field of discourse refers to the means of representing patterns of experience from which readers can make sense of. It concerns the nature of social activities in which language functions as some essential component, expression of some kind of process, some event, action, state of other phenomenal aspect of the real world. (Halliday, 1985)

It is interesting to note that the sales letters which are rated persuasive by readers are those letters which can elicit empathy from the readers, letters where readers can share the experience of writers. The subsequent two letters are examples of effective sales letter. A Japanese moving company is encouraging enquiries about its house-moving service through sales letters. Its central selling point is to project the image that the company moves house with care, and the catch phrase used is 'transportation with care'. The writer's task is to use language to arouse a vivid picture in the readers' mind, i.e., to use words to express or concretize the 'activity' or

other phenomenal aspect representing reality (real world) as apprehended in the readers' experience to bring out the concept of 'transporting with care'. Let us consider the following extract taken from the beginning of the letter:

> A Child in the Mother's womb. The root meaning of the character つつ or wrapping in Japanese implies the most Heart-felt Care there is. It's the kind of care which we, N-Express wrap and pack your treasured belongings we move safely all around the world.

The writer has chosen to evoke a sense of care and protection by putting forward the image of the state of a child in the mother's womb, the most protective, "the most heart-felt Care". This is further substantiated by associating the "most Heart-felt Care" with the N-Express which "wrap and pack your treasured belongings" and "move safely all around the world". To strengthen the image of 'transportation with care', the writer describes what happens at the N-Express when it comes to transportation:

> We a N- Express realize that your personal effects and household goods are very sensitive cargo. Many of the things that are of great sentimental value to you and your family often cannot be replaced... The basic philosophy of all members of the "heartliner" team is to treat your valuable goods not only as objects to be moved, but also as things which are close to your hearts and ours.

Every often, a specification of the 'going ons', the happenings, might cue the writer to a specific area of lexical items. The idea of "heart-felt care" is reflected in lexical items like 'wrap', 'sensitive cargo' 'sentimental value', 'valuable', 'close to your hearts and ours' and 'transportation with care' which conjure up a mental picture of care and protection in the readers' mind. A particular description of the 'process' of the activities bring out certain sentence construction. For instance, the 'service' attitude of the N-Express is conveyed through expressing what N-Express can do for them like "N-Express wrap and pack your treasured belongings.... we move safely all around the world", "N-Express realize.."

To build credentials in the readers, the writer continues with what the "Heartliner" international moving service does: "N-Express... has branch offices throughout Japan and is the largest transportation enterprise not only in Japan, but around the globe. The whole letter has thus created an impression that the N-Express is a sizeable, thus reliable moving firm which 'transport' one's belonging with 'care'.

In the following is a letter written to encourage enquiries about a language learning system. The central selling point is an "effortless way to learning new languages". The letter reads as follows:

> Have you ever wondered why by the age of five we are able to speak your mother-tongue fluently but experience great difficulties when attempting to learn a second language? At Language Systems, we employ the latest methods in teaching languages based on the same principles that children learn to speak from.

The writer has aroused from the reader some experience which most of them cannot deny "Have you ever wondered why by the age of five we are able to speak our mother-tongue fluently but experience great difficulties when attempting to learn a second language?" "As children, we learn our mother-tongue without being troubled by translation and grammar." The writer then tells the reader what can be done at the P-Language Systems:

> we employ the latest methods in teaching languages based on the same principles that children learn to speak from. ...we make use of the latest mother-tongue method of study which was developed at the Havard University (U.S.A.) by I.A. Richards. With this method, you learn the new language through seeing, hearing, speaking and ultimately thinking in that language, much the same way children learn to speak their mother tongue. "

After getting the readers to share his opinion on language learning in the previous paragraphs, the writer will have less difficulty in convincing readers to make enquiries about the language learning system advertised. To succeed in persuasion, writers must realize that when people read sales letters, they consider much more than the information conveyed. The readers interact with the sales message to create the meaning they derive from it. Whether the reader's self

generated thoughts support the writer's position or counter it, these thoughts contribute to the sum of the person's association with the subject matter in the sales letter. Therefore, it is important to select a relevant 'field' of activity to generate the desired response from readers. Afterall, it is the readers' association which consequently contribute to the success or failure of the writer's persuasive effort.

4.3 The Tenor of Discourse:

The reader's perception of where the writer stands is central to the acceptance of the sales message. However, the nature of the activity invoked in the field of discourse predicates the set of roles relevant to the types of the activity. The 'tenor' is the component through which the speaker intrudes himself into the context of situation, both expressing his own attitude and judgment and seeking to influence the attitude and behaviour of others.

In considering 'tenor' in sales letters, one is referring to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles and the role relationship among the participants, the outcome of which will determine the style and tone of the letter like whether the level of vocabulary has to be formal or informal or whether the writer should use a didactic or conversational tone.

It is true that the nearer writers are to the reader's frame of mind, the better the reception. Nevertheless, to be close to the reader does not mean that one can always assume the role of a friend. The writer must also take into account the social distance between the writer and the reader, and think about the appropriate use of language for that relationship. The following follow-up sales letter urging for action is read by the addressee and fifteen other readers.

> **I am concerned that I have not heard from you. Have you been too busy?**
>
> Dear Syed Manzuar Ahmeed
>
> About three weeks ago, I wrote to you about the C-bank Visa Card with an offer for you to apply. I've checked, and I discovered that you have not responded.

> Perhaps in your busy schedule, my offer has slipped your mind. Hence. You may not have had the time to fully appreciate the value of having the C-bank Visa Card...

It is generally agreed that the tone of the letter is problematic. Most find that the first sentence is too 'harsh' and thus unacceptable. The writer is also accused of being 'insincere'. Statement like "I am concerned that I have not heard from you" is considered 'hypocritical'. Others remarked that statements like "I 've checked, and I discovered that you have not responded" carries an element of accusation.

Perhaps the writer should consider the actual social distance between the himself/herself and the addressee and decide whether a command, a statement, an offer or an accusation will be more appropriate in achieving his/her objective.

The Mode of Discourse:

Halliday defines the mode of discourse as the part language is playing in a situation, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organization of the text, and its function in the context, including the channel (spoken or written), and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic and the like. (Halliday and Hasan, 1985) The mode determines the forms of cohesion, the pattern of voice, information focus and theme. In other words, the 'mode' of discourse determines how the text is presented to achieve its optimal reception.

Halliday mentions that the mode of discourse can be examined in three different ways: First, whether the role language plays is constitutive or ancillary. The second way mode may be considered concerns process sharing. It is about whether the addressee is able to share the process of text creation as it unfolds (the spoken medium) or whether the addressee come to the text when it is a finished product? (The written medium) The third important factor relevant to mode is the channel, whether the message travels on sound waves (aural) or on a piece of paper

(visual). (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). If one adopts the mode of discourse to the writing of sales letter, one has to note that the emphasis will not be on the subheadings pointed out by Halliday and Hasan. In sales-letter writing, it is obvious that language plays a constitutive role using the written medium, and the channel of communication is visual and graphic. Moreover, the rhetorical mode of sales letters being persuasive is predetermined as these letters set out to change the reader's attitude or influence his or her actions. Instead, one has to concentrate on the particularity of the text as a sales letter. The mode of discourse will be more about the particular part that language is playing in the text in terms of textual meanings and cohesive patterns in sales letters.

A sales letter is one kind of persuasive business writing which has its generic features and patterns of cohesion. This includes specific textual elements to attract the attention of the reader, arouse his/her interest, create a desire, and to urge readers to take action. However, these different elements must be linked or presented in such a way that the reader will adopt a positive attitude toward the letter. In persuasive letters, the cohesive patterns in question will not be stressed on cohesive devices like anaphoric, cataphoric references and so forth as mentioned in Halliday and Hasan's definition. Rather, writers should be aiming at a coherence of the text and the reader's interpretative ability. In other words, the coherence of text or content, in this case, refers to various kinds of semantic relations identifiable in the text rather than on the cohesive devices used to signal them. However, a text is considered coherent only when readers can readily make whatever inferences intended by the writer. Thus, the coherence of a sales letter should be examined primarily from the readers' perspective, i.e. the readers' interpretative ability which works on various factors like readers' knowledge of the subject and their inferencing ability.

The three variables of the contextual situation listed above will therefore act as a pointer of reference for deciding what kind of textual elements (content) can appropriately appear, when and how often. (Halliday and Hasan, 1985) Let us look at how 'field' and 'tenor' and 'mode' can help improve on the following letter:

Letter Four:

The Benefit Plus

Dear Cardmember,

Thanks to the financial service revolution and advanced technology, you are enjoying improved benefits and privileges with your charge card, bank and loan accounts. Like these other financial services, insurance plans improve over time to give better value, updated and more meaningful benefits.

Ordinary Life Insurance Plans pay only when you are dead. BENEFIT PLUS pays the moment you contract a critical illness... heart attack, stroke, cancer, kidney failure...

Ordinary Life Insurance Plans provide limited benefits in event you are disabled and unable to earn a living.

BENEFIT PLUS pays you immediately if you suffer total and permanent disablement from any causes.

BENEFIT PLUS brings hope to your family. Hope that with $40,000, you can have the best medical treatment to recover. And in the event of death, the $40,000 paid to your family can help them maintain a comfortable standard of living and achieve the aspirations you have for them.

No enrolments will be entertained after this date and this plan will definitely not be offered again this year.

Once you reach the age of 45 or can no longer answer "yes" to the health questions asked, you cease to be eligible to enrol for the plan. So act now, don't wait till your state of health changes!

Yours sincerely,

The subject claims that the A.I.D.A. approach is closely observed. The first paragraph is meant to draw the attention of the readers. The subsequent three paragraphs are attempts to highlight

the advantage of Benefit Plus over other insurance policies. The last few paragraphs are there to appeal for action. However, the subject does not realize that the information about the financial service revolution is not directly relevant to the sales message. This is confirmed by the fifteen readers who agree that the information is redundant. By juxtaposing Benefit Plus with other policies, the subject has not highlighted the superiority of Benefit Plus, but shows that the policy advertised is just another type of insurance policy which pays when you contract a fatal disease. The negative overtones in the last paragraph further deter readers from being persuaded.

One cannot take the 'mode' of the sales letter into consideration without examining, first of all, whether the elements chosen under the 'field' and 'tenor' of discourse complement each other. In other words, the writer has to consider whether the information selected and language used is appropriate for persuading the intended reader. Secondly, one cannot omit the generic features of sales letter in analyzing the 'mode', neither can one determine what is the appropriate information to impart with readers and correct attitude to adopt without taking into the account the situational constraint, i.e. the contextual situation. In case of the letter illustrated, the situation is one of an insurance writer trying to encourage further enquiries about the 'Benefit Plus' from readers who are credit-card holders of a certain company. The 'field' of activity thus has to centre around information which will encourage purchase or make enquries. At the same time, the information chosen should centre around a predetermined central selling point. Most important of all, this information has to appeal to the intended readers, which indicates that the 'tenor' of discourse has to be taken into account as well. In this case, the intended readers are Singaporeans, predominantly Asians who should earn more than $3000 a month to qualify for the credit card. Furthermore, the writer will have to decide what attitude or stance s/he has to adopt to impart his message: Should s/he be assuming the role of a friend, adopt that of a adviser and reliable sales person, or imposing the readers with a slight tinge of threats as the writer does in this sales letter: "No enrolments will be entertained after this date and this plan will definitely not be offered again this year.".

The 'mode' of discourse prompts writers firstly, to look at the rhetorical mode of the discourse. Having identified the 'field' and the 'tenor' of the sales letter, the writer should consider how readers would react to the negative overtones like "once you reach the age of 45 or can no longer answer 'yes' to the health question asked, you cease to be eligible to enrol for the plan" bearing in mind that topic like ill-health is regarded as taboo to some superstitious readers. Secondly, it is necessary to check the information focus and the theme of the sales letter which should have been decided when considering the 'field' of the sales letter. In this letter, the selling point seems to be the policy itself. In this light, the writer can question whether each piece of information that s/he imparts is relevant to the theme chosen. For instance, is the information at the beginning of the letter which reads, "Thanks to the financial service revolution and advanced technology, you are enjoying improved benefits and privileges with your charge card, bank and loan accounts." useful in highlighting the benefits of the policy advertised? How is the information related to the policy itself, and so forth. Furthermore, the writer should carefully tailor the content of the letter to suit the intended readers: whether $40,000 can help maintain a comfortable standard of living and achieve some planned aspirations for those who are earning an annual income of approximately $40,000 per annum. Thirdly, under the 'mode' of discourse, the writer has to see if all his/her textual elements are so presented to get the best response from readers. For instance, will the juxtaposition of two insurance policies bring out the advantage of the insurance policy advertised or will the presentation confuse readers? Finally, it is necessary to check if the letter include textual elements to attract readers' attention, arouse their interest, create a desire so as to persuade them to take action.

The 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode' are not kinds of language use nor are they simply components of a speech setting. They are a conceptual framework for representing the social context as a semiotic environment in which people exchange meanings. (Halliday, 1978) If we apply the concept of three variables in the contextual situation to the writing of sales letter, we are asking writers to look at the form and content (text), the setting, participants, the intention and effect as well as the medium and the genre of the writing.

The Significance of 'Field', 'Tenor' and 'Mode' in Sales Letter Writing

Most business writers may well be made aware of the five elements of letter writing, namely: 'What' are they going to communicate?, 'who' are they going to communicate with? 'why' and 'when' are they communicating? and 'how' are they going to communicate? Considering the aforementioned elements does allow writers to define their purpose of writing, determine the content of the letter and analyze their readers, but it does not enlighten writers to see how the 'what', 'who', 'why', 'when' and the 'how' interact, influence and manifest themselves in the process of writing the letter. Neither do these elements throw light on how the text forming components can be restrained by the contextual situation, the social context of the text.

In considering the 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode' of the discourse, we are analysing each text-forming components of the sales letters and how these components cohere to function as an effective text. These concepts help writers to understand the social environment in which meanings are being exchanged. Furthermore, as Halliday mentioned, we do not what we want to say independently of the setting, and then dress it up in a garb that is appropriate to it in the context, as some writers on language and language events seem to assume. (Halliday , 1978) It is important to note that all use of language has a context, a situation in which the text is unfolded and to be interpreted. It is also important to qualify the notion of situation by adding the word 'relevant'. The relevant situation, (the contextual situation) does not refer to everything that might appear in a speech event. It refers to those features which are relevant to the speech that is taking place. (Halliday, 1978)

Pedagogic Implications:

To plan a persuasive and effective sales letter demands more than adhering to the A.I.D.A. structural framework which is part and parcel of sales letter writing. Writing an effective sales letter is also more than answering the five basic questions 'what', 'why', 'who' the 'how', the

'when' in business correspondence. To be successful, the writer has to anticipate the reader's responses to various points the latter might make and construct the message accordingly. In adapting Halliday and Hasan's 'field' , 'tenor' and 'mode' of the discourse to the teaching of sales letters means that:

1. The writer will look at each sales letter as a text with its own contextual situation and objective of communication and then come up with a central selling point based on the type of social action, the relationship between the writer and the intended reader and the function of the letter.

2. The central selling point of the letter determines the type of social activities embedded in the text which generate the ranges of meaning as content. The writer has to think about (i) what will arouse positive response from readers, (ii) the means of representing or concretising his ideas with language that readers can grasp and respond favourably. As Halliday suggests, our powerful conception of reality consists of 'going ons' in life. To concretize experience for readers, writers can translate their ideas into tangible activities like the 'happening', the 'doing', the 'feeling' and the 'being'.

3. At the same time, the writer has to consider the social relation between himself and the reader by taking into account the type of offer, command, statement or question, attitudes and judgments embodied in the content. It is essential for the writer to predetermine the social relationship he wants to establish with the reader. The role the former chooses to play will be reflected in the tone of the letter, the attitude and style of the letter, which in turn is manifested in the mood and modality of the writing.

4. Looking at the 'mode' of discourse is a final check at textual elements of the sales letter (i.e. its presentation and its structure) to see how effective the text functions as a sales letter. The writer has to consider whether (i) the generic features (e.g. A.I.D.A. elements) of the sales letter has been effectively used in the process of persuading readers. (ii) the textual components, (i.e. the content) have been appropriately selected to achieve the writer's objective in evoking

positive mental associations from readers. Therefore, the writer's attitude, the reader's background, his social status, his interpretative and inferencing ability have to be taken into account. The A.I.D.A. plan, inadequate as it may be as a guide to writing sales letters, cannot be ignored but should be treated as an integral part in the teaching of sales letters. Although it does not emphasize how writers should use language to attract attention or to convince reader nor does it indicate how the informational structure of the letter should be related to the purpose of the letter, these structural components are the fundamental components of a sales letter without which the letter might not be recognized as one.

In a nutshell, the concept of 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode' enables writers to examine how to use language to enable readers who know nothing about the text take part in the interaction by constructing in their minds a context of situation that will enable exchanges to take place. The writer assigns to it a field, noting what is going on, and assigns to it a tenor, recognizing the personal relationships involved, and assigns to it a mode, seeing what is being achieved by means of language. Furthermore, this process involves choosing not only words which have to be perceived as relevant to the particular purpose of the message but also words which represent the knowledge of the world which the writer shares with his/her intended reader. (Halliday and Hasan, 1985) Thus, the concepts of 'field' ,'tenor' and 'mode' are guide-lines for business-letter writers to estimate their reader's belief and inferencing ability and how the former can use language to act appropriately on that estimate by the selection and arrangement of textual components.

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